

Hunt Slonem

Birds, Butterflies & Bunnies



Called a Neo-Expressionist, Hunt Slonem inserts realism into his Abstract Expressionism. He combines Abstract Expressionist techniques with mysticism and animal subjects of Islam and Mexico, and is best known for his paintings of tropical birds, based on a personal aviary in which he keeps about 100 live birds of various species.

His focus is on the act of painting, and he does not strive to convey a narrative message. He paints quickly, and often his colors are jarring; he is fascinated by the manipulation of paint. Slonem builds patterns of repeat images of the bird subjects and paints them in recognizable settings such as cages or trees. He usually begins by filling in a canvas with one color, then blocks in other hues, adds the animals or figures, and then the hatched scratch marks to complete his work.

Born in Kittery Maine, the child of a Naval family, Slonem spent much of his childhood living in various states including California, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Hawaii, Virginia and Washington. His art was greatly influenced by the different cultures in Mexico and Nicaragua, where he lived during college. He studied art at Vanderbilt and Tulane and spent a summer at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture refining his art.

In 1972, he moved to New York and started using Nicaraguan holy cards as subject matter for paintings, and he has continued to do paintings of Saints. Other portraits in Slonem's work include a series based on the actor, Valentino. In the 1980s, after three trips to India, his work became more formal and complex in composition. His work came on the avant-garde art scene when he moved to New York. There he did some huge, panoramic murals including an 85-foot long frieze for the Bryant Park Grill.

Since 1977, Hunt Slonem has had more than 350 exhibitions at prestigious galleries and museums both nationally and internationally. Globally, more than 100 museums include his work in their collections, among them the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. He has received numerous awards over the years, among them the prestigious "Stars of Design" award in art October 2009 in New York City, the National Endowment for the Arts Grant in 1991, the Greenshields Foundation award in 1976. Slonem divides his time between Louisiana where he owns two plantation homes on the historic register, Albania in St. Mary's Parish and Lakeside in Pointe Coupee; and New York City where he has lived and worked since 1973.

Hunt Slonem Studio

545 W. 45th St. 4th Floor, NY, NY 10036

Telephone: 212.620.4835 **Fax:** 212.924.6747

Email: hunt@huntslonem.com

web site: www.huntslonem.com

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2855 Coral Springs Drive, Coral Springs, FL 33065
954.340.5000 www.csmart.org 954.346.4424

